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ABSTRACT

The human service functions of community colleges are extremely diverse, and few are common to all institutions; however, community colleges share certain characteristics which distinguish them from other organizations providing human services. Among these is the degree to which colleges must interact with and be influenced by the laws and regulations of state and federal governments. Government requirements result in a need for coordination and cooperation and detract from the community college's flexibility in establishing operational objectives. Another distinguishing characteristic of the community college is its emphasis on the inherent value of the service as well as the cost of service. Finally, community colleges have unique organizational structures, which are sensitive to changes in bureaucracy and expenditures. One approach used by community colleges to increase their flexibility in developing innovative human services programs is cross-subsidization, whereby revenues and resources of successful programs are used to support programs that are not self-sustaining. The extent to which this practice should be allowed to support activities such as needs assessment and training is an important issue, involving considerations such as fairness, demands of funding agencies, line-item budget restrictions, and decentralized decision making. If human service programs are to receive continued funding the price will be creative budgeting and fund raising, innovative programs, careful selection of target populations, and interagency coordination. (KL)

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Directing Community College Human Services in the 1980's

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The present day functions of public and private human service organizations are essential to society. There are various types of human services and they offer a variety of activities all of which are directed to the benefit of people whether the service is voluntary or by request. A general definition of human services is the assistance provided by an organization to improve personal, economic and social welfare. Community colleges are organizations that typically provide human services. Human services are also provided by all levels of government, educational enterprises, hospitals, professional associations, churches and charitable foundations. Because of their varied nature and service, a specific definition of human service differs from community college to community college. The human service roles and functions of community colleges are growing faster than those of most private enterprises; they are becoming more extensive than ever imagined by previous generations.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

Human service functions of community colleges are extremely diverse and although some commonalities exist, few are applicable to all institutions. Among the distinguishing characteristics of community colleges as human service institutions is the degree to which they must interact with and are influenced by the laws, rules, and regulations of the state and the federal governments.

Specific program plans and budgetary procedures are mandated by legislative regulations. State and federal legislation and regulations impact on the community college's publicly supported programs. This results in a need for coordination and cooperation. In response, community colleges

as human service institutions have had to establish prescribed operational procedures as a direct part of their funding accountability. Also, in comparison to private service organizations, institutions using public funds enjoy far less flexibility in the manner in which they establish operational objectives. To a large extent, provision services such as GED preparation are determined by location and availability of facilities, resources and staff. Furthermore, proximity to the target population and responsiveness to societal needs by funding sources are inseparable major factors that promote the general success of service providers.

Institutional reputations are a more internal matter. The quality of services performed by individuals for others develops institutional reputations. The more obvious and concrete goals are more easily evaluated. Further, because services are conceptually based and performance oriented, reputations are transitory and constantly being considered. Finally, the concept of "success" is addressed differently in a community college as a service agency than in other human service organizations.

Another characteristic of the community college as a provider of human service is the emphasis on the inherent value of service, as well as cost of service. The concept of "value" is generally determined by the recipient need within a defined geographical area. In other words, the cost for the community college human service is determined by many factors such as market place, unit value, and community need among others. The cost of service delivery tends not to have a direct relationship to traditional business productivity and is not directly governed by competition.

Considered as human service organizations, community colleges have unique organizational structures. Staff and management tend to have a variety of personnel titles dependent on the peculiar nature of their program.

In some settings, structures may be specifically designated by the funding sources. In other settings the structure may be fairly undefined. Since the funding of human service programs is generally provided through some form of tax based budget allocation, rather than market value of provided services, it is highly sensitive to changes in bureaucracy or the expenditure of funds of personnel salaries.

Proponents of traditional accounting procedures should remember that the impact of human service programs is frequently intangible. A program's implied values or the results of those may not be immediately measurable even though such goals of placement are. With the increasing role of services in society and the demand for accountability, especially in a period of government cutbacks, human service management must more adequately explore, innovate, and develop new and more relevant programs for defined target populations.

CROSS-SUBSIDIZATION

One approach used by community colleges to facilitate innovation and development of human service programs is the practice of cross-subsidization, whereby revenues and resources of a successful program are utilized to provide or alleviate the needs of a program that is not self-sustaining. Such resource reallocations are often made in behalf of activities which have not been specifically designated in a given project but are important to the overall success of the institution.

Because of their very nature, community college services are content specific which generally means that new program funding must come from developing new services. This may mean seeking entirely different funding sources, developing new project rationales or creating new project areas,

even though the clientele may be the same.

Community college administrators need to be aware of pressures and counter pressures they may experience as they anticipate subsidization. Cross-subsidization can be used for a number of different activities, depending on the institution and program needs of the project. Examples, of cross-subsidization include but are not limited to, expenditures related to needs assessment, training, construction, renovation, advertising, personnel, program development, and reorganization. One aspect of such costs is the difficulty in quantifying results of the reallocation of funds. At best, only a limited relationship exists to typical input-output analysis. Therefore it is often difficult to track the specific value return for the dollar use. The extent to which cross-subsidization should be allowed for the benefit of a program is an important issue; currently, no definitive consensus is in use.

Flexibility typically does not come easily to publicly funded human service programs, even in a socity that is characterized by constant change and development. This can be seen in the frequency of instances of cross-subsidization in which standards of fairness or equity are not applied to programs of an organization. Pressures to maintain the organizational status quo may come from the staff or the upper level administrators of community colleges as well as from the institution's clientele or political sponsors. Money allocated to or generated by a program or activity should, in the main, be used in a related manner. Most funding sources contractually demand that money not be used indiscriminately for purposes of cross-subsidization. When forced to support other programs or activities, the staff of efficient and well funded programs may begin to compromise their efforts on behalf of the original programs. Consequently, the most successful program is typically as self-supporting as possible. The independent program yields the greatest possible return.

The desire to maintain the status quo also reinforces the practice of traditional line item budgeting. This is usually referred to as incremental budgeting. Program development tends to be hindered by the need to use incremental funds in lieu of start-up funding for new programs. Forced change occurs as a result of line item budgeting. Changes are made within line item appropriations and money is spent for new and different purposes. Project innovation and development can create characteristic problems. For example, line item budgeting requires administrators to anticipate all separate appropriations necessary to subsidize the initial costs of program development. This process limits the ability of the staff to quickly respond to opportunities. Typically, unspent funds within a line item are perceived as an instance of overfunding. Overfunding can result in an administrator's spending money in a manner devoid of relationship to an established need. This is prompted by the attitude of funding sources toward unspent money. As a result, superfluous innovation occurs to insure 100% future funding.

Innovation and continued development are vital to the growth of a community college and its overall service mission. The amount of support given to programs at their embryonic stage can be a deciding factor in the success or failure of their services. The basic rationale for cross-subsidization is to provide the means to support endeavors that benefit various elements of an organization.

A multifaceted community college must seek different returns from the different functions within its structure. At the same time, it must support independent efforts. Both the distinctive and support roles of elements of a community college must be recognized. To support multiple program goals, administrators must have a degree of flexibility in the operation and development of their organizational units. Such flexibility of decision making in

administration will in all likelihood result in more decentralization of the decision making process in a community college.

FUTURE NEEDS

Fiscal constraints characteristic of the 1980s will define human service organizations just as the service orientation and cross-subsidization patterns of the 1980s have done so. Community college administrators who concentrate on the specific outcomes of fiscal restraint may be able to employ this contingency productively.

Selection for innovation for priorities will be one outcome of fiscal restraint. With budgets decreased, community colleges as human service organizations will be able to afford few failures. Clienteles will be as carefully selected for the visibility of the institution's successful service as they were previously selected on the basis of need. For example, the 1970s demonstrated that adult and continuing education was of special interest to certain types of community colleges. The 1980s will produce continued service to adults but careful screening to select low-risk, visibly successful adults for assistance.

Creativity will also characterize successful community college human service programs. Human service personnel will have to explore new methods of fund raising as "padding" disappears from traditional budgets. As more community colleges compete for limited funds, new approaches to the provision of human services will be tested for cost efficiency. Furthermore, a functional dichotomy may arise as decentralized funding sources examine community colleges as prospective human services. For example, institutions with the longest track records and highest professional credentials can remain competitive but in order to do so they may have to eliminate or reduce certain stagnant procedures that slow down the production of major efforts. Retrenchment through indirect costs and tedious compliance procedures--

two budget devouring necessities in educational institutions--may now be viewed by funding sources with skepticism and disdain. Administrators of large institutions will have to rethink their traditional attitudes towards budgets, procedures and clients as they work with decentralized funding sources, i.e. block grants, whose administrators may want to use the community college's reputation for excellent service but are hesitant to support bureaucratic proliferation.

The most effective human service organizations will survive and grow because of their capabilities in linkages and coordination of services. To date the metropolitan community colleges have provided some excellent examples of coordination leadership with the community based organizations. Traditional and non-traditional degree-seeking clients enter these public service programs. The institution in turn facilitiates the transition for its students into support training such as on the job training and internships. Often the coordination function generates opportunities for cross-subsidization of programs in their experimental and growth stages. Service-oriented universities can also develop their linkages by working with community colleges to service and train clients while eliminating costly duplication of curricula, counseling and records keeping.

The human service function of community colleges will grow in the 1980s but no longer will institutions be able to operate autonomously. The price of continued funding will be creative budgeting and fund raising, innovative programming, careful selection of deserving but low risk service populations, and coordination among human service organizations. The 1980s are not only a new decade but a new opportunity for us in community colleges to meet needs and wants of society.

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